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SUBJECT: SUMMARY OF ICELANDIC MEDIA INTERVIEWS WITH US
AMBASSADOR OVER REALIGNMENT OF U.S. NAVAL AIR STATION
KEFLAVIK

REF: A) Embassy Reykjavik emails to Washington with
substance of each of the interviews 03/16/06

11. Summary: Ambassador held a March 16 marathon of interviews with seven media outlets (reftel A) to explain reasons behind the U.S. Government's decision to realign Naval Air Station Keflavik and withdraw its four F-15 fighters and search and rescue helicopters by the end of September 2006. The reporters asked many of the same questions about the timing of the decision, why the news came in a phone call, and what is envisioned for Iceland's defense in the future. End Summary.

Criticism of the Timing of the Base Decision

12. Ambassador gave separate interviews March 16 to National Radio, National TV, NFS TV (an all-news channel), the newspapers Morgunblaðid, Frettablaðid and Blaðid, and the Associated Press (from London). Nearly all the reporters asked her about the 'sudden' decision to realign the base and withdraw the fighters and search and rescue helicopters. She replied that this was a difficult decision was taken after long and careful analysis. In her interview with National TV, with an audience of 50 percent of the Icelandic population), she said: "Ambassador Gadsden did deliver the message of withdrawing the planes three years ago. Also, President Bush told the Foreign Minister then that the idea was under review and discussion."

13. She said the decision was based primarily on the evolving global security environment and is a part of the reposturing of U.S. military forces worldwide, which has resulted in the withdrawal of half a million U.S. military forces from Europe and Asia and the closing of dozens of military bases in the United States.

14. Asked whether this was a slap in the face to Iceland, given its generous cost-sharing offer made during the defense talks last month, the Ambassador responded: "We appreciated Iceland's generous proposal at the February defense talks, but the decision on the base realignment in the end was based on the changes in the global security environment."

Ignoring Iceland's Views?

15. Reporters also asked the Ambassador why the United States was 'ignoring' Iceland's views in taking this decision regarding the future of the base, and quoted some politicians as saying that this could amount to an

abrogation of the 1951 Defense Agreement. In the National TV interview, Ambassador said: "We listened to their proposals very hard. The treaty is flexible to accommodate this change. Our U.S. military presence has gone up and down over the years. The threats facing Iceland need to be looked at in the present context, and we will do that in future defense talks."

¶6. As she told the NFS-TV reporter: "This is a new chapter, a different chapter in our relationship. There have been changes in our relationship over the past 60 years, which is longer than most Icelanders have been alive. It is a new step in our relationship but we will continue to abide by the 1951 Defense Agreement."

Planes Outmoded Response to Today's Threats

¶7. When asked by National Radio about whether the planes were necessary for Iceland's defense, Ambassador answered: "We don't think that the stationing of the planes here is an appropriate use of those assets. We remain committed to Iceland's defense. Over the years, the U.S. military has made great strides in achieving the rapid deployment of troops. We need to look ahead to the security threats of the twenty-first century, not those that were present during the Cold War, and the treaty is flexible in that regard."

VAN VOORST